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Review of
ROGER F. GIBSON, Jr.,

Enlightened Empiricism: An Examination
of W.V. Quine's Theory of Knowledge

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ROGER F. GIBSON, Jr., **Enlightened Empiricism: An Examination of W.V. Quine's Theory of Knowledge**. Tampa: University of South Florida Press, 1988. Pp. 192.

«Enlightened empiricism» was the title of the 1st section of the 1st chapter of Gibson's previous book, *The Philosophy of W.V. Quine* (Tampa: University Presses of Florida, 1982), which is widely regarded as the most comprehensive and authoritative expository essay on the subject. In fact Gibson's second book elaborates upon some parts of the former one and anyway had better be read on the background of his previous book, of which it is, in a way, a continuation or a development. Taken together, those two books constitute an excellent exploration into Quine's philosophical system.

Gibson's construal of Quine is clear and plausible. According to it, Quine's world-view is a naturalistic behaviourism, a conception which rejects anything beyond the pale of what is somehow or other reducible to physics, especially any transcendental justification, any intentions or irreducibly mental entities. The only additional key to Gibson's interpretation is a crisp dichotomy of the ontological and the epistemological stand-points, a dichotomy, though, on which Gibson falls back in somewhat ad-hoc ways — as I'll try to show towards the end of this paper — but which anyhow serves to unify Quine's thought and avoid a number of interpretational difficulties by alleging the duality referred-to.

Gibson is very knowledgeable about Quine's numerous writings. His expository and interpretive plan is straightforward and firmly held on to. His arguments are very well-taken most of the time. His books teem with carefully knitted discussion, excellent hermeneutic glosses and a brilliant defence of Quine's philosophy. However the interpretation is not entirely free from some weaknesses. To the reviewer's mind it would be tiresome to dwell on Gibson's many right and good remarks, while it seems preferable to discuss those weaknesses instead.

One of them is that this interpretation makes too much of Quine's scientism. Now Quine himself has advised us to refrain from reading too much into his emphasis on science. As Quine talks about it, science is the whole of our theories about the world, whether or not such theories comply with the rules accepted in research communities as criteria on scientificity. Thus, Gibson's final remarks (on p. 178) to the effect that epistemologists are henceforth to embark on scientific studies — which surely include empiric and experimental research — rather than indulge in the usual kind of wall-confined elucidations seem somewhat excessive. Quine himself has indulged in such elucidations, of course, and has refrained from field research. To my mind, Gibson underestimates the philosophical task of bestowing order, cohesiveness and intelligibility upon under-philosophical thought or science. In this connection Gibson repeatedly quotes Quine's sortie against regarding philosophy as providing foundations for science. True, but the episcientific task of philosophy can be discharged in a nonfoundational spirit, once the naive idea of grounding is disposed of. (For philosophy to be episcientific does not mean that philosophy is outside science, of course, but that within the whole network of science, or human thought, it is invested with special organizing and rationalizing tasks.) Quine has acknowledged (in «Epistemology Naturalized») that this new epistemology can include 'something like the old rational reconstruction, to whatever degree such reconstruction is practicable'.

Gibson accepts that but his campaign against 1st philosophy leads him to overlook any rational reconstruction to any degree. New, the existence of degrees is what gives rise to another defect of Gibson's account. Not that Gibson fails to notice, or quote, many of Quine's remarks emphasizing degrees — degrees of observationality, of change, of similarity, of there-being-a-fact-of-the-matter-that, of certainty, of vulnerability to experience, of pleasantness, of noticing, and so on. Still, Gibson fails to draw some important conclusions from Quine's gradualism. He fails to notice that such gradualism is not compatible with two-valued logic. He refrains from commenting on Quine's «What Price Bivalence?» where the American philosopher himself spelled out some difficulties in reconciling his adherence to classical logic with his conception of matter. Moreover, Quine has gone only half-way in finding out about such difficulties, which are in fact much more widely pervading. If there are degrees of there-being-a-fact-of-the-matter-about, then classical logic, which rules out any such thing, seems wrong. This is why W. Lycan has rejected those degrees which Quine explicitly and repeatedly recognizes. But if those degrees are rejected there can be — upon Quine's other assumptions — no degrees of determinacy of translation. Consequently no degrees of observationality.

That Gibson, in exploring Quine's philosophy, has gone past the important logical difficulty raised by Quine's emphasis on degrees is related to a different kind of limitation of Gibson's interpretation. He somehow neglects Quine's contributions to the philosophy of logic and set-theory, fails to view it as part and parcel of Quine's whole epistemological enterprise. Now, if Quine's holism is to be taken seriously, revision of logical truth is an open possibility. Quine has recently emphasized that when he ascribes obviousness to classical logic he is not thereby committed to cleaving to it come what may, but just according it a high level of initial preference, which may nevertheless be overridden under pressure. Now, Quine's contributions to the field of pure logic and set-theory have developed a number of technical tools which can be put to use by nonclassical logicians who think that there is such a pressure. A thought Quine himself has at least encouraged with his above-mentioned paper «What Price Bivalence?» and with his countless remarks about degrees. For, if there are degrees of all those things, aren't there degrees of acceptance of belief? Aren't there degrees of truth? Aren't there degrees of warrant or justification? And is classical logic compatible with such degrees? Moreover, Quine's set-theories NF and ML also offer additional reasons for choosing some nonclassical logic or other, since, unlike the standard set-theories of Zermelo-Fraenkel or von Neumann-Bernays, Quine's set theories possess important philosophical advantages (they can serve to set up their own metatheory) and are metaphysically more attractive (by accepting the existence of the universe of all sets, and also, for any given set, of the set of entities failing to belong to it), but, most of all, are easily adapted to a gradualistic view of the world, to a view positing degrees of membership and of non-membership — whereas the so-called cumulative «conception» of sets serving as a philosophical rationalization of sorts for standard set-theories hinges on an on-off dichotomy, each set [absolutely] enclosing some things and absolutely shutting all others off.

Gibson's construal's last drawback is one for which Quine himself is responsible: an ambiguous attitude on the realism issue. This is where the dichotomy between ontology and epistemology is resorted to in an ad hoc manner. On the one hand, Quine and Gibson emphasize that to acknowledge that a posit is a posit is not to patronize it or to suggest that what is thereby posited is a mere invention ('positives are not *ipso facto* unreal': *Ways of Paradox*, p. 251). On the other hand an obscure «immanence of truth» is insisted upon, which would rule out any «things in themselves». Should the dichotomy be applied consequently, we would be entitled to ask whether the immanence is epistemic or ontic. If it is just epistemic, there are

things in themselves, only we can judge about their existence and properties solely within our own theoretical framework or scheme.

Yet, Gibson harbours misgivings towards a theory fitting the facts, and towards something's being true whether we could ever know it or not; he regards any such contention as a transcendental view of truth or of things-in-themselves. Quine sometimes seems to share those misgivings. But then Quine also stresses the difference between warrant and truth. Warrant is relative; truth is not. However, there are two threads in Quine's thought. One is what he himself calls his unregenerated realism, which clings to that unnegotiable difference between warrant and truth. The other is pragmatism which tends to drop the very idea of warrantless truth.

From his early writings onwards Quine has oscillated between those two positions. (Gibson is well aware of the oscillation, since he says, on p. 124, that there has been 'a tension deep within Quine's philosophy, between naturalism-cum-realism, on the one hand, and empiricism-cum-instrumentalism, on the other'.) In *Theories and Things* (TT) 1st edition, and a number of other latter-day papers, the pragmatist trend seemed to have conquered: factuality is internal to our theory of nature; the relation between the world and observation sentences is not one of mirroring, but just a causal link; simplicity (and in general compliance with the kind of canons laid down in *The Web of Belief*) is no presumption of truth; truth conditions are more than once equated to verdict conditions; and so on. More seriously, that thread is bound up with indeterminacy of translation (IT) and ontological relativity (OR). For, if OR is true, to debate whether one is going to change one's ontology is senseless, there being alternative translation manuals from the envisaged [purportedly] new ontology to our garden-variety or previous ontology. But then any debate as to a change of theory is futile, since any theoretic statement can be reduced to its Ramsey form which is nothing else but an existential quantification, which, as such, falls within the scope of OR. [See Gibson's book, p. 139.] Such considerations are likely to have weighed on Quine's mind when in TT he asserted that the world cannot be said in any sense to deviate from our theory, that factuality is internal to our theory, and that the only thing we can demand of the world is for it to assure the sequences of stimulation that our theory gives us to expect. But those very same remarks — which Gibson stresses and draws upon for his rejection of transcendental truth — are closely akin to Quine's «ecumenical» stance in «On empirically equivalent systems of the world», according to which any two observationally equivalent theories are equally true, there being no real choice between them. Nevertheless it has been Gibson himself — in his contribution to the Quine volume in the Library of Living Philosophers — who has, with his acute criticism, elicited Quine's retraction from that «ecumenical» position, favouring instead the «sectarian» one. (The retraction has brought about that the 2d. edition of TT has appeared with a substantial modification on p. 29, corresponding to the essay «Empirical Content»: while the 1st edition claimed that any two observationally equivalent theories, all whose implied observation categoricals are true, are true, the latter version says that they are equally warranted, leaving room for oscillation between them but forbidding ascription of truth to both.)

But, if Gibson fails to take into due account the ontology/epistemology divide he himself generally emphasizes when it comes to the issue of realism vs. relativism, he uses that dichotomy in a dubious way on discussing the very same question of OR — and more specifically Davidson's criticism. He says (p. 143)

Quine did not intend to be understood as claiming that relativizing reference confers factuality of reference, even relatively. (...) When Quine is writing about reference in an *epistemological*

vein, he can claim that «what the terms of a given language denote is not a question of fact...»
 ... However, when Quine is talking in an ontological vein, he can also claim that what the terms
 of one's uncritically accepted language denote *is* a question of fact.

The reviewer finds such a construal distasteful. It depicts Quine's thought as some sort of nonaggregative perspectivism maintaining in effect that what we say is true or not according as whether we are saying it in a particular vein or in a different vein. Then the ontology/epistemology divide would not concern what issues are being raised but in what vein they are being answered. That may be a way out of the difficulties OR encounters, but one which seems to me an avowal of failure. When Gibson also says (p. 149) that Quine's philosophy transcends the realist-idealist dichotomy and renders that old-time controversy obsolete, I wonder if to the extent that that may be grounded, it is not by means of the unalluring device of the two veins (when... when... : they would be not alternative, but alternate). Thus, Gibson screens that tension in Quine's thought: he quotes Quine's claim that what he has said 'of proxy functions and of wildly deviant but empirically equivalent theory formulations' has 'to do not with what there is and what is true, but only with the evidence for what there is and what is true about the world'; and he offers this comment: 'Although these remarks are ostensibly intended to shed light on underdetermination, they are equally applicable to ontological relativity and reference' (ibid.). Gibson thinks, I gather, that when speaking in an ontological vein Quine can make statements like those just quoted, whereas when speaking in an epistemological vein he cannot. As I myself see it, however, things are not so. Quine hesitates on the issue of realism and relativism, for some things he maintains commit him to relativism while other ideas he cherishes would rather push him towards realism. If realism is to carry the day, remnants of verificationism must be cast off, and something not entirely unlike Hartry Field's theory of reference (cf. Gibson's book, pp. 135ff) is to be espoused — which would mean giving up, or at least softening down, TT and OR.

There are also some minor points. Gibson's discussion on Quine's argumentation for holism in «Two Dogmas» seems to me needlessly intricate and in the end weak, since from principle (P3) (on p. 40) — namely that 'there is no acceptable theory of empirical confirmation for individual synthetic statements' — provided the 'is' is (Quine-ways) in a non-temporal present, holism follows since, according to Quine's definition quoted on p. 32, holism 'says that scientific statements are not separately vulnerable to adverse observations', and therefore (P3) entails holism on the very weak assumption that, if those statements are separately vulnerable, there [atemporally] is some acceptable theory about such being the case. (Gibson himself says, on p. 42, that (P3) is the negation of C, namely (p. 37) that 'one ought to be able to arrive at an acceptable theory of confirmation for individual sentences of theories'.) On my own [non-temporal] construal, (P3) is known to be true by induction, whereas, according to Gibson, (P3) only 'asserts that this [working out an acceptable theory of the confirmation of individual statements] has not occurred' (ibid.). (Doubtless, his construing (P3) that way is what makes him claim that Quine's inferring holism from (P3) is the 'weakest among the three [arguments] that Quine rolls out in defense of the holism thesis': p. 179.)

Throughout this paper, I have tried to discharge a reviewer's task consisting mainly in discussing arguments to be found in the book he is commenting on. That practice may be misleading, as it is likely to be here, since the book deserves fulsome praise above all.

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